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THE HAVASUPAI 600 A.D.—1955 A.D.: A SHORT CULTURE HISTORY

By DOUGLAS W. SCHWARTZ

THE HAVASUPAI are a tribe of Yuman-speaking Indians who now live at the bottom of Cataract Creek Canyon, a side branch of northwestern Arizona's Grand Canyon (Spier 1928). When they were first discovered, in 1776 by an exploring Franciscan priest, they were leading an economically double life. In the spring and summer they irrigated corn and bean fields from an ever-flowing spring of clear blue-green water, while during the winter they migrated up to the plateau,

FIG. 1
Map of Arizona showing the distribution of prehistoric cultures (After Colton).

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where they gathered and hunted the local flora and fauna until the following spring.

For some time there was indirect historical evidence that Havasupai had lived in the area since about 1500 A.D. (Schroeder 1953), but nothing definite was known of their prehistory. Archaeologically, the plateau country just south of the Grand Canyon, the winter home of the historic Havasupai, was occupied by a group called the Cohonina (Fig. 1). These people were thought to have inhabited the area between about 700 A.D. and 1100 A.D. (Colton 1939, pp. 26-29). But a blank spot existed in our knowledge of their life between 1100 A.D. and 1500 A.D. It was not known what had happened to the Cohonina after 1100 A.D., nor whence came the Havasupai, or whether there was a relationship between the two.

In the summer of 1953 I began an archaeological investigation of the canyon home of the Havasupai, with the feeling that the key to the problems in the area lay in this hitherto untouched region. This field work, sponsored by the Peabody Museum of Yale University, whose research program is supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, formed the basis for a Ph. D. dissertation written for the Department of Anthropology at Yale University (Schwartz 1955a).

The results of the study indicated a cultural continuum from the early Cohonina through the historic Havasupai. A summary of the conclusions is presented in the following pages. In order to separate the material into understandable units, it has been divided into periods. Each of these periods is described, as are the processes of culture change operating on it. It is with the desire of presenting something of the dynamics of Havasupai culture history that these processes are emphasized.

Period I — Exploration

Little is known of the early Cohonina people or their culture. They probably came to the plateau region south of the Grand Canyon about 600 A.D., presumably from the west. The first hundred years were a period of exploration, when the water sources were being located, favorable agricultural areas were being sought, and a few pioneering families were learning the all-important lessons of survival.

Colton (1945) has suggested that there was a population pressure along the lower Colorado River which might have forced the Cohonina and others away from the river banks and into the "hinterland." If this was so, then some of the people who were pushed out probably came into the future Cohonina homeland in small groups. This may be inferred to some extent from the small population during this period and from indications that the whole plateau had not yet been occupied.

Too little is known of the material culture of this period to characterize it, but already there were strong trade contacts with the Kayenta people to the east (Fig. 1). This is especially manifest in the ceramics. Although little comparative material is available, it might be expected

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that during Period I the Cohonina were but slightly differentiated from their Cerbat cousins to the west (Fig. 1) (this assuming that the two "tribes" split from the same basic stock). 172

The adaptation to the new conditions was probably achieved by small family groups, the techniques doubtless being the result of a combination of Kayenta methods and old traditional patterns.

The Cohonina of Period I were laying a foundation for a new type of life, one which was to serve its people for many generations to come. These people were leading a frontier existence and were pioneers in the strict sense of the word.

Period II — Growth

By 700 A.D. the Cohonina knew enough about their newly-settled country so that a period of growth could begin. The population tripled by 800 A.D. and doubled again by 900 A.D. (Schwartz 1955b). Settlements now covered most of the Coconino plateau and by this time were even found around the northern part of the San Francisco Peaks to the southeast.

The flood-plain method of farming (Bryan 1929) was probably the most widely practiced technique, for this was a time of excellent growing possibilities because of the relatively high amount of moisture. Farming was also more extensively practiced now because of the greater population, but there is no evidence as yet to suggest a seasonal occupation of the plateau or that there were any non-Cohonina settlements in the area.

Other changes were also taking place in Cohonina culture. Architecture began to take on a more permanent nature, with the development of stone masonry, but perishable structures were still an important dwelling feature. Ceramic influence from the Kayenta country became increasingly significant. Not only were Kayenta pots obtained in trade, but their designs were copied on Cohonina products. As a result of this influence from the northeast, and through internal growth, Cohonina culture was well on the way to achieving its first climax.

Period III — Climax

The next two hundred years of Cohonina development, 900 A.D. to 1100 A.D., were plainly such a climax. The population reached its peak, and the cultural inventory began to ramify through many paths of experimentation. These new attempts are most noticeable in the architecture, where a number of distinct construction styles can be observed: masonry surface granaries, patio houses, rectangular forts, and the old stand-by, the brush dwelling (McGregor 1951).

All the available land on the plateau was now being used, and since the population was probably still growing, new locations were needed in which to farm. It was apparently as a result of this population pressure that the canyons of the great Colorado River system were first used on a permanent basis. The most striking example of this,

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172 and certainly the most successful of the experiments in this new way of life, was the occupation of Cataract Creek Canyon. Perhaps this canyon had been explored previously, but now its virgin fields were being harnessed to produce food for a growing population. The few bold families who established homes in the canyon at an elevation almost a mile lower than those of their contemporaries were the vanguard of a new era for the Cohonina. They were to provide the necessary adaptations to enable the rest of the tribe to survive in the coming period of natural and artificial desiccation which destroyed much of the life of the northern Southwest (Reed 1944).

The agricultural techniques of this period were enriched by the addition of irrigation, which must have been necessary for life in the canyon. The farmers, attracted to the permanent stream in Cataract Creek Canyon, may have traded with the irrigators of the Verde Valley (Bartlett 1939) and, seeing how efficient this method of cultivation was there, may have applied it to their own area. At this time also there may have been the development of a seasonal economic dichotomy. Those who moved into the canyon to farm undoubtedly found it a wonderful place for summer cultivation. However, it was certainly not suitable for winter living, because of the short winter days, the lack of fuel, the scarcity of wild food, and the high humidity caused by the stream. As a result, it is reasonable to assume that these early canyon farmers went back up to the plateau and joined the rest of the tribe during the winter to hunt and gather. With the events that were to follow in the coming decades, this pattern of seasonal economic change was to grow and become the focus of all Cohonina life.

From the fact that we find no burials, we assume that the dead were disposed of by cremation at this time. This trait probably came into the upland area, with the Cohonina, from the west.

Three main processes were involved in the development from Period II to Period III. These were diffusion, population growth, and the development of new ecological possibilities. The diffusion of new traits, mostly from the Kayenta area, pottery designs, architectural types, economic techniques, and undoubtedly a number of non-material traits, was the initial process which caused the changes differentiating the two periods. The difference in habitation concentration also distinguishes the two periods, the first being one of growth, the second one of climax. The utilization of the canyon, which resulted in an incipient seasonal economic dichotomy, further intensified the differences from the previous period.

Period IV — Defeate

Between 1100 and 1300 A.D. non-Cohonina peoples were in Cataract Creek Canyon, living alongside the original canyon inhabitants. It was near the end of Period III that the Cerbat (Fig. 1), the first of these foreign peoples, came to live with the Cohonina. They represented the beginning of a movement into the canyon which lasted over one

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hundred years and which was to swell its population many fold. Beginning at approximately 1100 A.D., the movement into the canyon also brought Prescott groups from the south, Kayenta peoples from the east, and the remainder of the Cohonina, who up to this time had lived more or less permanently on the plateau. These migrations were probably due to the pressure of raiders. The raiders, whoever they were, may have been forced into their way of life because of the decrease in general moisture which characterized this period and possibly caused them to desert their own land. The population of the plateau Cohonina dropped sharply during Period IV, and by 1200 A.D. they had abandoned their upland home entirely. 172

Only at this time were cliff dwellings occupied, a fact which perhaps reflects the nature of the period. It seems reasonable to assume that protection was the motive behind these population movements, with the canyon providing the logical defense against the intruders.

During the latter part of the period, when there were no more full-time residents on the plateau, the seasonal economic dichotomy, which possibly began earlier, must have been completed. Summer-canyon and winter-plateau life was probably a universal Cohonina trait. Considering the habitation density in the canyon during this period, three times greater than the estimated density in historic times, one is forced to conclude that the canyon's occupants would have used the plateau in the winter to supplement the summer agricultural harvest.

During this time three processes of change were important: diffusion, population pressure, and the necessity for defense. A few ceramic traits are the only items which were definitely diffused to Cohonina culture, but the presence of many foreign groups suggests that other traits were probably also borrowed. Population concentration, which reached an all-time canyon high, certainly affected the dynamics of Cohonina culture, but the necessity for defense was the dominant feature of this period, touching many parts of Cohonina culture and society and possibly changing each.

From the standpoint of rate of culture change, this period might be contrasted with the following one. Change, as well as population density, was extremely high during Period IV, which on this basis might be interpreted as the second climax in Cohonina culture history. Significantly, it followed directly on the heels of the previous climax, and except for the fact that it was in a different location and had a new orientation, it might be considered a phase of the same peak. The Cohonina culture and society of Period IV were certainly distinctive; never before or after was northwestern Arizona to see anything comparable.

Period V — Tranquility

In the latter part of Period IV there was a sharp decrease in raiding, evidenced by the movement of habitation off the cliffs, back to the talus top and probably the valley floor. By 1300 A.D., the beginning

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172 of Period V, the change was complete. No more cliff dwellings were in use. For the Cohonina three hundred peaceful years were to follow, a rest they could well appreciate.

During this period the population was small compared to that of the previous one, when it had been three hundred per cent higher. The drop was mainly due to the exodus of all but one of the foreign groups near the end of the thirteenth century. Only the Cerbat remained in small numbers, perhaps represented by scattered families. As far as can be determined, all the Cohonina lived in the canyon during the summer, but in the winter the people were probably scattered in small settlements on the plateau. Possibly there were some farming communities in the upland regions, but these could have been located only near springs, for since Period III, when full-time farming was last practiced on the plateau, an increasing aridity had made the plateau less well suited for agricultural exploitation.

The archaeological record indicates very little change during Period V, which for this reason might be termed a period of stability. There were still trade contacts and influences from the Tusayan groups to the east, and if the historic Havasupai pattern applied at this earlier date, a certain number of Cohonina may have resided among the Hopi in their pueblos east of the Little Colorado River. However, this had little effect on the Cohonina, who by this time had had enough contact with the prehistoric Hopi to have accepted all the traits they wanted.

This period of peaceful stability and low cultural intensity ended near 1600 A.D., with the first gentle impacts of Anglo-American culture.

Period VI — Anglo-Diffusion

175 The gradual acquisition of American material culture characterizes Period VI. Living as they did in the seclusion of Cataract Creek Canyon, the Cohonina-Havasupai were able to avoid the sharp break which took place in the culture of so many American Indian groups at the time of contact. Although there had been Spanish expeditions into the general region as early as 1540, when Cardenas discovered the Grand Canyon, the borrowing of white traits probably did not begin until the establishment of the Franciscan missions in the Hopi country, in 1629. By 1776, when the first white man descended the canyon trail, the Havasupai had already acquired horses, cattle, and European trade cloth (Coues 1900). They had also adopted Old World plants such as apricots, figs, peaches, and alfalfa before the later white men began to frequent Havasupai territory regularly.

The culture which we have outlined for this period is that traditionally known as Havasupai, with the addition of the Anglo items. Spier's (1928) description of the Havasupai, which attempts to give a picture of this culture as it was before the new items were accepted, is thus possibly applicable to Period V.

As far as can be determined, settlements at this period were still concentrated in the canyon, with the plateau used only for winter

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hunting and gathering. As the whites moved into the upland area for cattle ranching, the territory of the Havasupai was gradually usurped. This movement of ranchers and farmers into the surrounding area may have forced the Apache and Yavapai to raid the Havasupai for food. On the other hand, their sporadic raiding may have been the continuation of an older pattern, on a less intensive scale.

Most of the articles of aboriginal manufacture were still being produced, such as pottery, clay pipes, stone knives, bone tools, fire drills and hearths, bows and arrows, basketry, skin clothing, etc. Three main architectural forms lasted from the preceding period: the brush structure, the rock shelter, and the talus top granary. Throughout this period many of the old customs, such as cremation, remained unchanged.

The old pattern of Hopi trade continued throughout the period, but the items which the Havasupai received shifted in part to white man's goods such as crockery, metal pans, guns, plants and cloth, replacing Hopi pottery, fabric and seed.

The main factors which caused changes in this period were the gradual increase in trade goods from the Americans and the shifts in Havasupai culture to accommodate them. The new traits were usually received through indirect contact, probably through the Hopi and the Walapai. For this reason the sixth period of Havasupai history has been termed one of diffusion, in contrast to the remainder of Havasupai history, which is characterized by acculturation.

Period VII — Anglo-Acculturation

The present period of Havasupai culture is a time of acculturation. It began with the establishment of the Havasupai Reservation in 1880, followed closely by the growth in Anglo population in the whole upland area due in part to the construction of the railroad, which reached Flagstaff about 1882. During the 80's and 90's the first popular accounts of the Havasupai began to appear (Cushing, 1882; Sinclair, 1891; James, 1899), but the adventurers who wrote these accounts were preceded, as is usually the case, by prospectors, who unfortunately left no written records of their impressions.

In the late 1890's the federal government sent a farmer into the canyon, and shortly thereafter a school teacher. This was the beginning of intensive acculturation. The farmer introduced new and better tools, and perhaps a few modern farming methods. The first teacher and those who followed began the conversion to other parts of white culture, especially the English language. The school was also influential in changing the old pattern of plateau winter gathering, by gradually forcing the children to attend school during the winter. The increasing use of the upland area by white cattlemen also lessened its value to the Indians.

Clothing, which had already begun to change, now rapidly switched to the white man's garb, Southwestern variety. Moccasins were probably

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the last item to change. The English language has not even yet been completely adopted; Havasupai is still spoken in the homes, at play, and at work. The present teacher (1954) has complained that, for this reason, the children forget most of their English vocabulary during the summer. English will be more widely used, however, with the increasing influence of schooling, the Saturday night cowboy movies, and the radios and phonographs.

A Havasupai village established by the Park Service near the Grand Canyon National Park settlement on the plateau now forms one of the main centers of Havasupai life and acculturation. The inhabitants work either for the Park Service or for some other white firm concerned directly or indirectly with the Grand Canyon tourist business. The cash income derived from this work and from the Havasupai's own tourist trade in the canyon has radically changed their food patterns. Now they are able to, and do, buy food in the tribal store, which stocks the standard commodities. It is doubtful that canned soup or Hershey bars played a very important role in the diet of the pre-reservation Havasupai.

While the crop assemblage has remained approximately the same as that of the previous period, the farming methods have changed considerably. For example, a tractor is now used in the canyon to plow the fields. It was packed down the narrow trails piece by piece, as was the electric power plant which supplies current to the school and other government buildings.

The big flood of 1910, which washed out most of the farms and homes of the canyon, brought from the government relief in the form of small wooden frame houses. Indirectly, this caused the extinction of the talus top granary. After the flood the old brush dwellings were rebuilt and the new frame houses were used for storage, since they were supposedly too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer for living purposes. A few individuals, however, have adopted the plan of the frame house and have built stone houses, using modern techniques. This form may become the common dwelling of the future.

The suspension of crematory activities also began soon after the government invaded the canyon. The old pattern was gradually replaced by the extended burial, which is universally practiced today.

The acculturation of the Havasupai, which is by no means complete, took place first by the diffusion of traits into the canyon through the Hopi and Walapai, then by the selected introduction of white culture through the government workers, and finally by individual contact with whites at the Grand Canyon National Park village and elsewhere. These processes have increasingly accelerated the change of an aboriginal people to potentially full-time participants in Anglo culture and society.

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